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ABSTRACT

To determine if there was a pattern to undergraduate applicants who were admitted to but did not attend the University of California at Berkeley ("no shows"), a survey of these "no shows" was conducted in Fall Quarter 1976. The main focus of the study was on freshmen whose demographic profiles and high school achievement levels could be compared with existent studies of Berkeley freshmen enrolled for the quarter in question. "No shows" were divided into three sub-populations: those who attended some other high prestige institution, those who attended less selective or prestigious institutions, and those who did not attend college at all that quarter. The Gourman ratings and Barron's selectivity index were used to classify institutions. Applicants who attended other institutions were requested to compare them to Berkeley on 15 decision factors including academic, administrative, and personal preferences. Analysis of the survey results clearly showed the institutional strengths and weaknesses of a distinguished state university as perceived by applicants who chose to go elsewhere. Implications for a more effective admissions process follow directly from the study findings. (Author/SPG)

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FACTORS IN FRESHMAN STUDENTS' DECISIONS NOT TO ATTEND A DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities expend a great deal of money and effort to attract qualified applicants. Getting these students to apply, however, is only the first step to getting them enrolled, since many of them choose not to attend. To determine whether there was a pattern to these "no-shows," the University of California at Berkeley surveyed undergraduate applicants who were admitted to, but did not attend that campus in Fall Quarter 1976.

The main focus of the study was on freshmen, whose demographic profiles and high school achievement levels could be compared with existent studies of Berkeley freshmen enrolled for the quarter in question. "No-shows" were divided into three sub-populations: those who attended some other high prestige institution, those who attended less selective or prestigious institutions, and those who did not attend college at all that quarter. The Gourman ratings and Barron's selectivity index were used to classify institutions.

Applicants who attended other institutions were requested to compare them with Berkeley on fifteen decision factors including academic, administrative, and personal preferences. Analysis of the survey results clearly showed the institutional strengths and weaknesses of a distinguished state university as perceived by applicants who chose to go elsewhere. Implications for a more effective admissions process follow directly from the study's findings.

FRESHMAN NO-SHOWS: WHO AND WHY?

Colleges and universities expend a great deal of money and effort to attract students whom they consider to be qualified applicants. The proportion of admitted depends on the number applying, the number of spaces available for new students, and the anticipated "no-show" rate. Uncertainty about the no-show rate is less for selective public universities, which have relatively low costs and a built-in clientele in their states, than it is for private institutions which have higher costs, greater flexibility in admission standards, and market competition for students. Nevertheless, public universities are interested in knowing who, of the students they admit, choose to attend some other institution, and to which institutions these students are lost.

The University of California at Berkeley has long attracted a sizable share of the children of both established, high status families and upwardly mobile ethnic groups in the state. The University has offered real competition to prestigious, private institutions for California's most highly qualified high school graduates.

In recent years the Berkeley faculty, itself recruited worldwide by the University's reputation for excellence and resources for research, has been concerned that the campus is losing a large proportion of its most capable applicants to prestigious, private universities. These applicants, highly qualified in terms of grade point average and entrance examination scores, should be well prepared to cope with the complexities and to profit from the opportunities of a great university. In the opinion of Berkeley's faculty, it is irrational for such students to attend costly, private institutions, even of a stature equivalent to Berkeley's, unless

the students are offered generous financial aid packages to make up the huge differences in costs.

To determine whether the perception of the Berkeley faculty was correct--that the vast majority of Berkeley's no-shows are attending prestigious, private institutions--the Office of Admissions and Records surveyed students who were admitted to Berkeley for Fall Quarter 1976, but who did not register.

METHOD AND POPULATION SURVEYED

In August, 1977, we mailed a questionnaire to the approximately 1700 Fall 1976 undergraduate no-shows. The form was modeled upon the "Admissions Research Questionnaire" used recently by the Office of Admissions at Carnegie-Mellon University. We asked the respondents to list, in order of preference, the colleges to which they had applied and been admitted and the amounts and types of financial aid offers they received, if any. We asked respondents who did not attend college in Fall 1976 to indicate the reasons why, and their present activities and future plans. If they did enroll in a college that term, we asked them to name the institution attended and to compare it with Berkeley on fifteen decision factors, if applicable. We also asked them to rank the three most important factors in making their final college choice, and to provide demographic and high school performance information.

We decided to analyze only the results for freshman respondents because 1) the questionnaire return rate for no-show freshmen was vastly better (60%--541 responses out of a population of 900) than that for others (32%), 2) having come directly from high school, the freshmen were a homogeneous group compared to other undergraduates, and 3) data on Fall 1976 freshmen were available from two excellent sources: the student

description questionnaires of the College Board Admissions Testing Program (ATP), and the 1976 American Council of Education (ACE) Survey of Entering Freshmen at Berkeley, conducted by Berkeley's Office of Student Affairs Research. No comparable information was available for other undergraduates.

RESULTS

Who The No-Shows Were

When we compared the background characteristics of the no-shows to those of the Berkeley freshman class of Fall 1976, the two groups were found to be identical only in terms of the ratio of men to women (3:2). Parents of the no-shows were somewhat more highly educated (66% of fathers and 50% of mothers had at least a bachelor's degree) than parents of the freshmen (60% of fathers and 44% of mothers had at least a bachelor's degree). Approximately 40% of the no-shows and about 25% of the freshmen had attended high school in southern California or out of state.

The proportions of freshmen and no-shows from ethnic groups were similar, with one exception. Drawing upon the large Bay Area Asian-American population, Berkeley has an unusually large percentage of students from this ethnic group; they comprised one-fourth of the Fall 1976 freshman class. However, only 12% of the no-shows were Asian-Americans. Possible reasons for this finding are presented later in the report.

Grade point average (GPA) and College Entrance Examination Board test scores, traditional criteria for admission to the University, were self-reported by the respondents both for this survey and the freshman comparison surveys. The GPAs for both groups were identical, approxi-

mately 3.60.[1] However, the mean Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores[2] of the no-shows were substantially higher than those of the freshmen, particularly on the verbal section (603 versus 517; 639 versus 594 for math). The greater gap in verbal scores probably reflected the slightly higher average socio-economic status (SES) of the no-shows. Higher SAT scores coupled with equal GPAs most likely indicated that, on the average, the no-shows attended more competitive (and higher SES) high schools than did the freshmen.

Where The No-Shows Went

The hypothesis of our study was that the vast majority of the no-shows attended institutions of equal or greater stature than Berkeley. Consequently, it was important that we establish a dichotomy of the institutions our no-shows attended--those less prestigious than Berkeley, and those with equal or greater prestige. We did this primarily on the basis of the Gourman ratings of university quality (Gourman, 1977). However, to do justice to the competitiveness of the prestigious colleges, we added institutions in the "Most Competitive" and "Highly Competitive" categories of Barron's College Admissions Selector (Barron's, 1974) to supplement the Gourman list of the most highly rated larger institutions.

Contrary to the Berkeley faculty's expectation, only three-fifths of the no-shows attended prestigious institutions. It is likely that this group constituted a bare majority of the total no-shows, if we take into account the probability that the more highly qualified applicants responded to our survey.

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[1] GPAs were computed as weighted averages of category means: e.g., 3.00-3.49, 3.50-4.00

[2] SAT scores were also computed as weighted averages of category means, with an adjustment downward in the top category (i.e., for 651-800, $\bar{X}$ = 700).

--Insert Table 1 here--

We observed significant differences in SES background (the most reliable indicator of which is parents' level of education) among respondents attending different types of colleges and universities. At the extreme, there were 35 percentage points between parents of the students who selected community colleges or California State University and College (CSUC) campuses and parents of students who selected Stanford. The students in these two groups also showed the extreme differences in both math and verbal SAT scores (about 100 points on the verbal). It is interesting to note, however, that math and verbal scores of the students who selected community colleges and CSUC campuses were as high as the average of those who selected Berkeley.

The no-shows who selected the highly prestigious institutions were much more likely to come from southern California or out of state than those who selected the less prestigious colleges. This seems to reflect Berkeley's policy of giving admissions priority to northern Californians only in the less qualified half of the applicant pool.

--Insert Table 2 here--

NO-SHOWS WHO DID NOT GO TO COLLEGE

Only twenty (4%) of the no-shows did not attend college at all in Fall 1976. Their parents' education, GPA, and SAT scores were comparable to those for the entire no-show population. Sex differences were considerable, however--three-fifths of this group were females, compared to only two-fifths in the no-show population as a whole. Finances were a greater deterrent to the females than to the males, but the main reason for not going to college, for both sexes, appeared to be the desire to have time off from studying or to go to college later.

ANALYSIS OF DECISION FACTORS BY TYPE OF COLLEGE

Introduction

We planned this study to discover why no-shows preferred private prestigious institutions to Berkeley, but found that at least two-fifths of them attended institutions less prestigious than Berkeley, or did not go to college at all. Therefore, we felt it was important to attempt to relate the reasons students gave for preferring other colleges to the characteristic appeal for each type of college.

We subdivided the less prestigious group of institutions into community colleges, the CSUC system, and less prestigious private colleges (including out of state public universities less prestigious than Berkeley). There are numerous community colleges throughout the state which do not charge tuition, and offer open admission. Living/commuting problems are rare for students at these colleges. CSUC campuses are also spread rather evenly across the state, making living/commuting arrangements relatively easy. These colleges charge lower tuition fees per year than Berkeley, they are smaller, less competitive, and more oriented to undergraduate teaching than Berkeley. Less prestigious private institutions and out of state public universities are far more costly than Berkeley for California residents. These institutions feature smaller size, lower student-faculty ratios, living away from home, and other factors designed to provide a supportive environment for their students.

Since Stanford is definitely Berkeley's biggest competitor, for purposes of our analysis we sub-divided the highly prestigious group of institutions into two segments, Stanford and all others. Stanford is the most prestigious large private university in California. Its high status

pastoral location, reputation for excellence, and highly selected student body encourage family traditions in attendance. The other prestigious institutions, mostly out of state, feature a wide variety of attractions, chiefly those similar to Stanford's, but also, for California youth, a chance to live in another part of the United States.

Decision Factors For All No-Shows

As we anticipated, the factors in students' decisions not to attend Berkeley differed significantly by the type of college they selected. Nevertheless, several factors were common to all no-shows. In the past faculty and administrators thought that the decision of no-shows to attend private institutions (Jeffrey, 1978) is related to Berkeley's relatively lengthy period between application (November) and notification of admission (February to April, with some not being notified until August). This factor was mentioned by only a handful of respondents, however, undoubtedly due to the fact that the no-shows were generally well qualified, and were notified of admission by April at the latest.

While no-shows viewed the teaching reputation of Berkeley's faculty as near-excellent, they saw the size of the campus and its student-faculty ratio as unsatisfactory relative to all other types of colleges selected. The respondents also perceived housing as less available and more costly at Berkeley than elsewhere.

Our questionnaire (largely based on that from Carnegie-Mellon University) asked for a direct comparison of Berkeley with the institution selected, on the basis of the students' perceptions of the two institutions. The comparison was elicited in two ways. First, we asked the students to rank fifteen potential decision factors on a scale of 1 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent), with the option "N" if any factor(s) had no

influence. Second, we asked students to write down the three most important factors in their decision, whether or not the factors appeared on our list. The scaled decision factor format proved to be particularly useful in relating perceptions of costs to the types of colleges attended by the no-shows.

--Insert Table 3 here--

No-shows who selected Stanford and other private institutions perceived Berkeley's costs as excellent, but those who chose community colleges perceived Berkeley's costs as unsatisfactory. At the same time, Stanford students considered costs at that institution to be unsatisfactory, while community college students felt costs at their institutions were excellent. Nevertheless, no-shows attending Stanford and the other highly prestigious institutions rarely indicated costs or financial aid among the three most important factors in their decisions on where to enroll.

Decision Factors For No-Shows Attending Prestigious Institutions

The decision factor which sharply differentiated no-shows who selected highly prestigious institutions from those who selected less prestigious institutions was the reputation of the college selected. In fact, those who selected Stanford mentioned reputation more than any other decision factor. They also consistently mentioned size of the institution and reputation of the faculty, followed by location, parents' influence, warmth of the institution, and other personal reasons. Although students perceived costs as substantially better at Berkeley, family finances and financial aid availability did not appear to be important considerations in the decision to attend Stanford. Comparable numbers of students applied to both Berkeley and Stanford for financial aid (45% and 55% respectively) and considered the offers acceptable (31% and 37% respectively). Financial

aid awards were much higher from Stanford than from Berkeley ($3,500 as opposed to $900), especially for women. Stanford was the first choice of virtually all the no-shows who attended there. Berkeley was typically the second choice of Stanford students from the urban counties of northern California and the third choice of others.

No-shows attending prestigious institutions other than Stanford consistently mentioned size as the most important factor in their decision on where to enroll. Reputation of the school, its faculty, and student body were major factors. Like no-shows who attended the less prestigious private colleges, these students were attracted by the lower student-faculty ratio, special academic programs, and location--often distant from home--of the college selected.

Although about half of these students applied to Berkeley and the college they selected for financial aid (43% vs. 50%), only 24% thought Berkeley's offer was adequate, as compared to 38% who thought the offer from the prestigious private institution was sufficient. The amounts of aid for those who received it differed by a 1:3 ratio. But the more significant consideration appears to have been that only 15% received aid from Berkeley as compared to 35% who received aid from the college selected. Berkeley was the second or third choice of both northern and southern California no-shows who attended these high-prestige institutions. This group of students had applied to far more colleges than the others--more than four applications, each, on the average.

Decision Factors For No-Shows Attending Less Prestigious Institutions

Berkeley was as likely as the college attended to be the first choice of community college and CSUC students. Nevertheless, this group, comprising at least 19% of the no-shows did not come to Berkeley. No-

shows who attended community colleges and CSUC campuses indicated costs and available financial aid as major factors in their choice. Two-thirds of community college no-shows and half of CSUC no-shows applied to Berkeley for financial aid, but only 10% of these students considered the offer adequate. For community college students two other indicators of financial barriers to Berkeley were commuting distance and housing. They perceived housing availability as unsatisfactory for Berkeley and excellent for community colleges, reflecting the savings from living at home. Many community college and CSUC no-shows gave personal reasons for their choices. Often they were intimidated by the competitiveness of the Berkeley student body, and preferred a more relaxed situation for the first couple of years. Some CSUC students mentioned size, location, and career preparation as factors in their decisions. Many community college and CSUC students made their choice partly on the grounds of size and student-faculty ratio, though they recognized that the Berkeley faculty's reputation is excellent.

No-shows who attended the less prestigious private colleges appeared to have preferred their choice to Berkeley primarily on factors having to do with the collegiate atmosphere of these institutions. Like those attending the highly prestigious private colleges, these students frequently mentioned the smaller size, more appealing location, lower student-faculty ratio, and special academic programs as factors in their decisions. Unlike no-shows who attended prestigious private colleges, however, these students commonly noted "available financial aid" as an important decision factor. The majority of this group applied for financial aid to both Berkeley and the college attended. More significant than the difference in the amount of the financial aid offers (a 1:2 ratio) was the fact that 51% of the re-

spondents in this group indicated offers they received from the college attended compared to only 18% who received offers from Berkeley. The "no-deal" from Berkeley for many students who received offers from private institutions contradicts the conventional wisdom that private institutions offer a "better deal" than Berkeley. The greater prevalence of financial aid offers and the "excellent" contacts with admissions personnel noted by these students point up the private college's success in the competition for students in a market situation.

Decision Factors For Ethnic Minorities: Asian-Americans

Too few Black and Hispanic respondents were included in the no-show population to examine possible different patterns of decision factors. The reader is referred to the recent study of Berkeley's affirmative action no-shows for Fall Quarter 1977 (Jeffrey, 1978). The "yield" (ratio of registrants to admittees) was particularly high from Asian-American applicants, and factors in their decisions not to attend Berkeley were somewhat different from factors influencing whites. Asians were more likely than whites to attend low cost community colleges and the CSUC campuses, and to mention costs and available financial aid as factors in this choice. On the verbal section of the SAT, Asians attending community colleges and the CSUC system scored 100 points lower than whites attending these institutions, though math scores were the same. Sixty percent of fathers of white no-shows attending low cost public institutions had at least a bachelor's degree compared to only 18% of fathers of Asians. Consequently, the scores of the Asian students undoubtedly reflected lower socio-economic status and language handicaps. On the other hand, fathers of Asians attending prestigious private institutions were nearly as likely as those of whites to be college educated. SAT scores of the two groups were very similar at these institutions.

It may be inferred from this pattern that Asian students at Berkely, as well, are considerably less affluent than whites. At all levels of socio-economic status, Asian-American parents appear to have higher educational aspirations and greater willingness than white parents to invest resources in their children's university education.

CONCLUSIONS

One-fifth of the freshmen admitted to the University of California at Berkeley for Fall Quarter 1976 chose to go elsewhere, for a variety of reasons. Despite higher costs, most of the no-shows attended private colleges and universities. For some of them costs were not a significant factor. For all of them the perceived advantages of a smaller student body, lower student-faculty ratio, and other factors related to college life outweighed the disadvantage of high costs.

The large prestigious public university cannot change its absolute size. Perhaps it can improve high school students' perceptions of the learning process and collegiate atmosphere that prevails within its academic departments and living groups.

The fact that 20% of the no-shows attended the less costly and more widely scattered community colleges and CSUC campuses provides encouragement to less selective state institutions not to write off high school students who are eligible for the state's highly selective university system. Finally, the distinguished public university has a second chance with its freshman no-shows who attend community colleges. After time to mature, and to gather resources, many of them welcome the opportunity to attend the University.

TABLE 1: Colleges and Universities Attended by No-Show Freshmen Admitted to the University of California at Berkeley, Fall Quarter 1976

College or University	Per-cent Attending	
Did not attend college	4% (20)	
Less Prestigious than Berkeley	37% (202)	
Community Colleges	9% (47)	
CSUC System	10% (54)	
Univ. of Southern California	3% (15)	
Other less prestigious California private institutions	10% (55)	
Less prestigious out of state private colleges	2% (13)	
Less prestigious out of state public universities	3% (15)	
Unclassifiable institutions	1% (3)	
As or More Prestigious Than Berkeley	59% (319)	
Stanford	18% (98)	
Other prestigious California private institutions	8% (44)	
Prestigious out of state private institutions	21% (112)	
Harvard	6% (33)	
U. S. Military Academies	3% (17)	
Prestigious out of state public universities	1% (6)	
Out of United States universities	1% (3)	
Other University of California campuses	1% (6)	
	101% (541)	100% (541)

TABLE 2: Background and Performance Characteristics of No-Shows by Type of College Attended

	Community Colleges	CSUC	Other Less Prestigious Institutions	Other Highly Prestigious Institutions	Stanford
Per cent of fathers with B.A./B.S.	48%	48%	54%	74%	83%
Per cent of mothers with B.A./B.S.	28%	22%	44%	60%	64%
High school grade point average	3.62	3.59	3.55	3.67	3.72
SAT-verbal score	529	535	559	634	647
SAT-math score	607	614	598	663	667
Per cent from southern California and out of state	11%	22%	21%	52%	51%

TABLE 3: Comparing Perceptions of College Costs by Type of College Attended - Means on Scaled Decision Factors[a]

	Community Colleges	CSUC	Other Less Prestigious Institutions	Other Highly Prestigious Institutions	Stanford
University of California at Berkeley	2.10	2.93	3.87	4.15	4.35
College attended	4.88	4.45	2.79	2.63	2.21

[a]Scale: 1.00 = unsatisfactory to 5.00 = excellent

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